

PAY CLOSE ATTENTION

"While we fully intend to plant our vineyard and open our winery here, in light of the absurd sideshow that our application has caused, and to prove that we are not trying to hide behind, circumvent or otherwise gain some sort of dispensation or favor, I would like to withdraw our application to be included in the Ag district at this time." With these words to the Farmland Protection Board, Rivendell has temporarily dropped their application to move their winery to Route 299 and Albany Post Road. I am writing because they will return and the entire New Paltz-Gardiner community should know the issues as we all stand to be endangered and face a reduction in our quality of life. Make no mistake; this is not only a neighborhood issue, with a bunch of NIMBY's, but an incursion that will impact all of us.

I am opposed to the move of the Rivendell Winery from its current location to the corner of 299 and Albany Post Road for three main reasons: The change in character of the community, the threat to public health and safety and the destruction of the view shed of this precious area.

The winery poses a clear public health and safety risk and I believe this is the most important reason to deny this move. The entrance and exit is 50 feet from Route 299, a fast and heavily trafficked road. There are already too many accidents on this corner and Rivendell will considerably increase the danger and risk of accidents.

People come to Rivendell to drink and even one glass of wine will impair judgment, and two or more will effect coordination -- a person doesn't have to appear intoxicated to be a risk behind the wheel. You may ask, why is this different then the current operation? For two reasons: Libertyville Road, for whatever its problems, is not Route 299 which is much faster and dangerous, as well as heavily trafficked . During peak weekend wine tasting times the winery will probably increase in volume at the 299 location. There could be 1,000 to 1,400 cars a month which could translate to 200 to 300 cars per weekend with drivers who have drunk entering Route 299. The hours of the winery, closing at 6 p.m. coincide with peak weekend traffic. I believe the health and safety risk is overwhelming and should Rivendell move, as proposed, accidents and possibly fatalities will be the result.

Rivendell will also contribute to the destruction of the wonderful view shed at the corner of Route 299 and Albany Post Road. Local residents want to preserve open land, and tourists certainly come to New Paltz for the beauty of the area. The proposed corner is possibly the most known and beautiful view in New Paltz, protected by Mohonk one sees the full Shawangunk Range in all its glory. Many photographs, post cards and paintings are from this view. Shall we have to put up a traffic light to accommodate the resulting safety issues; shall we look out from Mohonk and see a parking lot? Shall we see signs and other necessities of business as we pass this wonderful area? I hope the west of the Wallkill remains a true residential and agricultural area and that Ulster County and New Paltz does not sell its most valuable asset -- its beauty -- for a retail/commercial use of this treasured area.

Finally, Rivendell will operate a wine store and sell wine by the glass and have bottles available for purchase. They will plant a few acres of grapes to appear to be an agricultural use, but the overwhelming number of products -- 75 different NYS wines currently will be made elsewhere to be sold here. They have had many acres available in their present location and have not grown a grape. They currently operate two wine bars in New York City and this operation will be no different, except that grapes will now decorate the property. One has to consider the overall use of the property -- is it commercial and retail (even if it licensed as a farm winery and has been classified agricultural)? I believe it is and essentially will function as a store.

Rivendell is just where they should be and may they prosper in their current location.

It is downright silly, almost preposterous and inappropriate to consider moving an alcohol-based business such as a wine bar right next to a fast and heavily trafficked road. Should this come to pass it will only increase public risk, ruin the view shed and change the community character for absolutely no gain except to the owners of Rivendell. Pay careful attention New Paltz and Gardiner or I believe it will be parking lots and car crashes near the Gunks.

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